

Reppin' in the Great North

Two CSO members support 83 chapters in far NorCal

Every Primary Contact Staff has challenges. Usually they are people-centered. District and chapter leaders can behave in frustrating and unpredictable ways and make our workload heavier. It's a given but can't be quantified and planned for. We roll with it and keep working hard for our members.

Human behavior can't be accounted for, but many other factors can be measured and considered when it comes to assignments—but they aren't, except for the rough ratio of members to staff. Number of chapters and contracts, tables, presidents? Area? Driving distances? Often these answers are one or a few, and not that far. At CTA's northern outpost at the Redding RRC, the numbers are eye-watering.

Jennifer Tarabochia and Lori Adams patrol an area of Northern California larger than nine states. Together they are responsible for 83 (!) local chapters, including four county offices, three community colleges, and two ESP chapters. There are Basic Aid districts and (lots of) Necessary Small Schools in the mix, too.

Their most distant chapter takes 5 ½ hours to reach across winding, mountainous two-lane roads. In a normal year, each will spend 60-80 nights away from home, and in these remote parts of the state Lori diplomatically describes many of the lodging options as "quirky". They will average enough work miles on their cars to almost circle the earth. Snow, ice, deer and smoke can plague their journeys.

Many of their chapters are tiny. Jennifer's smallest has two members. Lori said three of her chapters "each had one but they were all non re-elected. Some have none. I tried to reach out to them with holiday cards last year but there were no responses." Identifying and nurturing leadership in many chapters proves virtually impossible. Lori continued, "There is no release time for any leaders and only a few have a handful of days for conferences or site visits."

Bargaining and representation are where Jennifer and Lori feel spread the thinnest. Jennifer shared "In any given year, I can be actively sitting at and running 12-15 tables. In addition to that, I'll be advising, running financials, etc. for another 5-10." Lori estimates she assists with 20-30 tables and added that in these rural areas "Subs are always scarce and members don't want to take release for bargaining, so all my afternoons are booked." Driving several hours in a day for a short meeting to represent a member is common. Planning is crucial and every few weeks they will tour their territories like a rock band, making as many



Lori Adams



Jennifer Tarabochia

contacts as they can in a few days on the road. But when a crisis hits, they simply cannot provide the level of representation members in larger chapters enjoy and all deserve.

While the pandemic sharply curtailed their time on the road, Lori relates "All of my leaders needed attention at the same time," which means Requests For Information, Demand to Bargain Letters and MOUs for dozens of chapters – and working with a lot of boards and superintendents who "didn't believe that COVID was real." This mindset plus the dearth of reliable broadband in many parts of rural NorCal meant districts pushed hard to stay in-person, giving rise to a multitude of Reasonable Accommodations meetings as well.

Several other staff deal with assignments like these. The CSO Workload Committee aims to alleviate that and allow these colleagues to close the gap of missed opportunities, recruitment, training and involvement. It takes time, effort and resources to reactivate dormant chapters and empower leaders, and bring these things to fruition. CSO knows our CTA members deserve it. Hopefully, CTA leadership and management can come to believe it too and work together to make it happen.

Who We Are:

CSO Organizer is produced by the California Staff Organization (CSO), the union for professional, departmental and Regional UniServ staff who work for the 310,000 members of California Teachers Association. CSO affirms that Black Lives Matter and is committed to working to remedy the trauma of racism, white supremacy and police brutality within public education, CTA, CSO and society.

Comments/inquiries? Email WeAreCSOCommunications@gmail.com



The Language of Gender

People often conflate or use the terms “sex” and “gender” interchangeably. While connected, the two terms are not equivalent. When we assign a newborn’s sex as either male or female (some US states and other countries offer a third option!) based on a baby’s body parts, we make lots of assumptions about the child’s gender, and place cultural expectations on them. Many societies view “sex” as binary, with two rigid, fixed categories of male or female based on reproductive anatomy. Unfortunately, a binary view fails to capture the diversity of biology, because there are many more than two sexes!

Some people feel aligned with their sex assigned at birth, but some do not. Gender identity is about our internal experience and naming of our gender. It may or may not correspond or differ from the sex we were assigned at birth. By age 4, most kids have a stable sense of their gender identity. Because we are provided limited language about gender, it may take a person some time to discover or create the language that best communicates their gender identity. Being open to listening and not making assumptions about someone's gender identity is a great place to start.



Making an effort to use gender neutral terms communicates that you’re conscious of folks’ different gender identities and the gender binary is limiting. Practice by substituting “they” into “he/she” binary language or try out some of these alternatives instead of “ladies and gentlemen” and “brothers and sisters.” You may even want to add your gender pronouns to your email signature or Zoom account to signal that you don’t assume someone’s pronouns by looking at them.

Fresh Look, Same Solidarity



California Staff Organization has a new logo, following a vote by members at the CSO Annual Meeting in April. The new logo was created by CSO member and CTA multimedia specialist Terry Ng. Visit our Facebook page (@WeAreCSO) to download and share your support for the best labor staff union in the country. #WeAreCSO.



United Against Hate

Our Asian American and Pacific Islander communities have been the targets of increased hate, racism and violence since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. If you see *something*, say *something*, and file a report at StopAAPIHate.org — because we all deserve to be safe in our communities.

Keys to a Successful New Hire Orientation

Although food, prizes, games, and gifts are all fun and make new hire meetings attractive, they don't necessarily do the hard lift of recruiting potential members to join their union. This is a more strategic and thoughtful effort that will take intention and personal contact.



Here are some items to consider when planning your new hire events:

- Know Your "WHY." Potential members don't join what you do, they join why you do it! The CTA Advocacy Agenda is a great tool for this. Our union members work together for the best schools for our students. Highlight how members in your local are fighting for students.
- Don't Third Party Your Union. Avoid saying "the union" which implies another entity outside of the workers themselves. Ask them to join with you – their colleagues, in their union – to ensure together you can continue getting great results.
- Let Members Share Their Stories. Rather than just having union leaders speak to membership, ask rank-and-file members to be special guests and speak to the "union difference" in their lives or their profession. A member who has children can share how child bonding leave has impacted them. A member who received a significant salary improvement can talk about how higher wages have helped them. A member who used to work at a non-unionized school can talk about what it's like to work at the whim of management without a collective bargaining agreement.
- Don't talk at members too much. Make it fun. Find out about who they are and how they got to be in the profession. Utilize the values you uncover to connect them to the shared values of your union.
- Make it as easy as possible. Sign them up using join.cta.org but have paper forms available in case technology fails. Don't accept "I'll do it later." You should know who your new members are by the end of the event. Then strategically follow up one-on-one if there are any new hires who didn't join.



**"Let the workers
organize.
Let the toilers
assemble.
Let their
crystallized voice
proclaim their
injustices and
demand their
privileges.
Let all thoughtful
citizens sustain
them, for the
future of Labor is
the future of
America."
—John L. Lewis**

Supporting Our Students: A Social Justice Campaign

Our students deserve the best! The best supports, best class sizes and the best educators! Right now, our students need quality supports more than ever! These are the messages that are being heard throughout several Alameda and Contra Costa County local union chapters in a coordinated organizing/bargaining campaign to support all students. The San Ramon Valley Education Association (SRVEA) and other locals are currently implementing the #SupportOurStudents campaign. One of the aspects of this student-focused campaign in SRVEA is supporting their members and students who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).

The #SupportOurStudents campaign has shined a spotlight on the inequities that exist in the lack of racially diverse hiring practices and BIPOC representation at all levels throughout several school districts in both counties. The SRVEA Ethnic Minority Director, Jennifer Shuen, is worker agency in action! Shuen worked closely with CSO member and CTA Primary Contact Staff Larry Spotts and SRVEA President Ann Katzburg to develop and implement an organizing plan focused on supporting their BIPOC members and students.



"Our students deserve the best, and this is one step towards a more diverse and inclusive school district."

After surveying self-identified BIPOC SRVEA members, their organizing plan focused on three main areas: leadership, curriculum and professional development. "These were the areas that were widely and deeply felt by the SRVEA BIPOC community," Shuen shared. The next step was to create a message frame that outlined what a win looks like: "To support all our students and ensure they have full and complete access to a quality education, they must see an educator force that reflects their ethnicity." SRVEA shared their plan to win with district management that included an ask and a commitment from management to be disciplined with their framing with SRVEA membership and the community.

To better understand how SRVEA members can support all students, a group of nine met with district management and shared their plan. They shared that their meeting was about inclusion -- not the exclusion of anyone. Educators wanted to know management's plan for more BIPOC representation in all positions in the district. They made it clear that the educators of color should not bear the burden to prove and improve the inequality of their employment environment.

The group demanded that for every administrative position that was posted, district management would be required to interview at least one candidate of color. They wanted a mandate that there would be a social justice, anti-biased and antiracist literacy unit taught to all students in every elementary school; that the district would require a world language for students to enhance cultural competency; and that the new ethnic studies course curriculum would be a graduation requirement. SRVEA members demanded all racial and social justice trainings be delivered to both district management and educators, and that district hire and include BIPOC trainers.

SRVEA members asked the superintendent for a clear response from him by the second week of June. They asked that workgroups during the summer be inclusive of SRVEA members of color and that the district develop, launch and implement action plans by the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. The superintendent said he could not give a response to these asks until fall.

While they wait for a second meeting with district management, Shuen continues to organize. She will meet with and listen to SRVEA members of color, making sure that members are seen and students are supported, as well as pushing district management to share data and start looking at how to retool their systems.

"San Ramon Valley Unified students do not see their educators of color in leadership positions, and they can feel those limitations. This is not what we should be teaching our students," Shuen said. "Our students deserve the best, and this is one step towards a more diverse and inclusive school district."